



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, D.C. 20240



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Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretaries
Heads of Bureaus

From: John Berry
Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget

Subject: Federal Travel Regulation; Mandatory Use of the Government-Issued Charge Card for Travel - Final Rule

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Department's policies for implementing the Federal Travel Regulation; Mandatory Use of the Travel Charge Card - Final Rule as issued by the General Services Administration on January 19, 2000. The Final Rule was published as a result of enactment of the Travel and Transportation Reform Act (P.L.105-264). The Final Rule provides implementing regulations for mandatory use of the Government-sponsored travel charge card for official travel, timely payment of travel vouchers by agencies, and use of salary offset when requested by the charge card contractor (currently the Bank of America) to collect seriously delinquent accounts. Implementing procedures dealing with travel policy will be issued by the Office of Financial Management; personnel policies dealing with the use and abuse of charge cards will be issued by the Office of Personnel Policy; and procedures relating to the integrated charge card program will be issued by the Office of Acquisition and Property Management.

The Department's policies are as follows:

I. Mandatory Use of the Government-Sponsored Travel Charge Card - Effective Immediately on all Temporary Duty and Relocation Travel

The Department uses a single charge card which covers the travel, purchasing and fleet business lines. This policy is directed toward the mandatory use of the Government-sponsored charge card for the travel business line (Travel Charge Card).

-Mandatory Use of the Travel Charge Card

It is mandatory that holders of the Travel Charge Card use the card to purchase transportation tickets, and pay for lodging and rental cars while on official travel, unless the Travel Charge Card is not accepted, or an exemption has been granted.

- Obtaining a Travel Charge Card

Employees who are expected to travel on official business are required to obtain the Travel Charge Card, and will comply with the terms and conditions specified in the cardholder

agreement. New employees who are expected to travel are required to apply for a Travel Charge Card within 30 days of their appointment, and will acknowledge their understanding of the Department's mandatory use policy in writing. Employees who carry delinquent account balances from a previous Travel Charge Card will be required to satisfy their existing obligation before a new card will be issued.

- Use of the Travel Charge Card

Holders of the Travel Charge Card are required to use the card for the purchase of transportation tickets, lodging, and car rental expenses necessary to conduct official travel, unless the card is not accepted by merchants or an exemption has been granted. The Travel Charge Card should also be used whenever practicable for any other official travel expenses such as meals, taxis, parking, etc.

The Travel Charge Card may only be used for expenses related to official travel. Use of the travel charge card for items that are centrally billed (such as transportation tickets and rental cars) should be limited to reimbursable travel expense amounts under the Federal Travel Regulation. In those rare instances where centrally-billed items exceed the amounts reimbursable under the Federal Travel Regulation, employees shall reimburse the Department for any such excess amounts at the time the travel voucher is filed.

- Exemptions From the Mandatory Use of the Travel Charge Card

Program Assistant Secretaries are hereby delegated authority to grant exemptions to the mandatory use policy as deemed necessary and justified, and this authority cannot be re-delegated. Requests for exemption by employees within the Offices of the Secretary and the Solicitor shall be submitted to the Assistant Secretary- Policy, Management and Budget. The Inspector General will approve exemptions to the mandatory use policy for OIG employees. All requests for exemption must be submitted to the appropriate Assistant Secretary, and copies of approved exemptions will be sent to the Office of Financial Management. As required by the Federal Travel Regulation, the Office of Financial Management will report all exemptions granted by the Department to the General Services Administration within thirty days.

- Loss of Travel Charge Card Privileges

Employees who lose their Travel Charge Card privileges due to misuse or account delinquency will be expected to come into compliance with this policy by promptly resolving any outstanding balance on the Travel Charge Card, and to use personal funds to finance all travel expenses (except transportation tickets) on official travel until Travel Charge Card privileges are restored. When personal funds are thus used, employees will be reimbursed for qualifying travel expenses by submitting a proper travel voucher. However, employees should be advised that additional charges may be imposed if Payroll Offset procedures are necessary to resolve delinquencies on outstanding Travel Charge Card balances (see Section III below).

In cases of extreme hardship, employees who have lost charge card privileges may request written approval for a travel advance on a trip-by-trip basis from their Program Assistant Secretary or equivalent, who may redelegate this authority to a level not lower than the Bureau Assistant Director for Administration. Consideration of such requests will be made on a case-by-

case basis, and approval should not be assumed. It should be made clear to employees that the Travel Charge Card should be used for all allowable expenses associated with official travel, and that any exceptions should be short-term in nature and rare.

A written record of all such approvals, as well as the basis for each approval, will be maintained by the approving office and a copy forwarded to the Office of Financial Management. This record shall be regularly reviewed by A/S- PMB.

- Disciplinary Actions for Non-Compliance

Disciplinary actions for non-compliance with this policy will be handled in accordance with Departmental personnel policies and the Department of the Interior's Personnel Handbook on Charges and Penalty Selection for Disciplinary and Adverse Actions, which may include oral and written reprimands, suspension without pay, and removal from Federal service.

Supervisors and managers should consult with their servicing personnel office prior to initiating disciplinary actions.

II. Departmental Responsibility for Paying Travel Vouchers - Effective on all Temporary Duty and Relocation Travel Performed After February 29, 2000

- Timely Payment of Travel Vouchers

The Department will pay travel claims within thirty calendar days after an employee submits a proper voucher to his/her approving official. Any travel voucher submitted to the approving official that cannot be approved will be returned to the employee for correction within seven calendar days with an explanation of why the voucher (claim) could not be approved as submitted. Employees are reminded that current policy requires travel vouchers to be submitted within five work days after completion of the travel, or every thirty days for extended travel.

- Late Payment of Travel Vouchers

Travelers reimbursed after the thirty day period from the date of submission of a proper voucher will be paid a late payment penalty as prescribed by the Federal Travel Regulation, and any late fees that could have been imposed by the travel charge card contractor.

III. Collection of Delinquent Amounts Upon Written Request of the Federal Charge Card Contractor - Effective Immediately on All Balances

- Collection of Delinquent Travel Charge Card Accounts by Salary Offset

In accordance with their cardholder agreement, employees are obligated pay the undisputed balance on their individually-billed Travel Charge Card account within 30 days of the billing/closing date.

Upon the written request of the Travel Charge Card contractor, the Department will initiate a

process to collect delinquent amounts owed on individually-billed Travel Charge Card accounts from future salaries paid to employees (salary offset). The Department will notify employees in writing of the contractor's request for collection assistance, and will inform employees of their "due process" rights relating to the contractor's claim before salary offset is initiated. Before initiating a salary offset action, bureau Finance Offices will verify that the employee has been reimbursed for a properly filed travel voucher. Employees carrying delinquent Travel Charge Card accounts for which travel vouchers have not been filed will be subject to disciplinary actions, as prescribed in the Department's Handbook on Charges and Penalty Selection for Disciplinary and Adverse Actions.

cc: Associate Directors for Administration
Chief Financial Officers
Deputy Chief Financial Officers
Bureau Finance Officers
Bureau Personnel Officers